

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: HUMAN SERVICES - VETERANS' SERVICES

DATE: OCTOBER 3, 2011

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS STRAINER
GIRARD
SOKOL
BENTLEY
WOOD

OTHERS PRESENT:

DENISE DiRESTA, DIRECTOR OF VETERANS' SERVICES
DANIEL G. STEC, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
PAUL DUSEK, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD
BILL MCGARR, FORMER DIRECTOR OF VETERANS' SERVICES
SKIP STRANAHAN, WE THE PEOPLE
AMANDA ALLEN, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

SUPERVISORS VANNESS
CHAMPAGNE

Mr. Strainer called the meeting of the Human Services Committee to order at 9:36 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Bentley, seconded by Mrs. Wood and carried unanimously to approve the minutes from the prior Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Denise DiResta, Director of Veterans' Services, who distributed copies of her agenda to the Committee members. *A copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. DiResta apprised during the prior week it had come to her attention that the white bus they had been using jointly with the Department of Social Services (DSS) would no longer be available for Veterans' transportation. She explained the bus had been purchased by the DSS with Medicaid grant funding and noted that the associated salaries for three part-time Van Drivers, as well as gas costs, had been funded by the DSS using Medicaid reimbursements. Since the State had recently assumed responsibility for transportation of Medicaid recipients, Ms. DiResta advised the van was no longer necessary for this purpose, nor was any further funding to be provided for transportation costs. She added that the Veterans' Services Department was not permitted use of the bus because of the manner in which it was purchased, but noted that Suzanne Wheeler, Deputy Commissioner of the DSS, had contacted the State to determine whether the vehicle could be transferred or purchased by the County to resume its use for transporting Veterans, but had yet to receive a response. In the meantime, Ms. DiResta advised, her Department had a van available for transportation purposes; however, she stated, it had high miles and required regular repairs. She then presented a request to transfer the salaries of the three part-time Van Driver positions to her budget, along with a line item for gas expenses, to allow the non-mandated transportation services to continue. Ms. DiResta advised the salary and gas expenses would need to be transferred to her Departmental Budget retroactive to August 1, 2011, when the Medicaid funding ceased.

Mr. Strainer questioned whether the DSS would continue to use the bus and Ms. DiResta replied in the negative, advising they had no use for the vehicle since the State had assumed all responsibility for transportation of Medicaid recipients. She added that the van would sit in the parking lot unused until a determination was made as to whether the County could acquire it.

Paul Dusek, County Administrator, apprised that he had been involved in discussions surrounding this matter which had been very confusing as the ownership and means used to purchase the van were initially unclear. After a bit of research, he said they were able to determine that the bus had been purchased through a State Medicaid grant with the intention of using it to transport Medicaid recipients to appointments in Albany, NY. Since that was the

same destination for many Veterans who had scheduled appointments at the Veterans' Hospital in Albany, NY, an agreement had been reached to transport both groups using the Medicaid bus. Mr. Dusek advised that because the State had recently decided to assume responsibility for the costs of transporting Medicaid recipients, Medicaid reimbursement would no longer be provided for this expense; additionally, he noted the Medicaid bus could not be used for any other purpose than to transport Medicaid recipients because it had been purchased using Medicaid grant funds. Mr. Dusek said he was optimistic that a response would be received from the State within the next few weeks as to whether the County could reasonably acquire the bus to resume Veterans' transportation. He noted the bus was an older model with a considerable number of miles and might have depreciated in value to allow the County to obtain it for a very low price. Mr. Dusek stated that Veterans' transportation was not a mandated service and if the Committee desired to continue this benefit, they would need to refer the issue to the Finance Committee to determine an alternate funding source to support the related costs.

Mr. Strainer questioned whether there were Veterans who were also Medicaid recipients and Ms. DiResta replied in the negative, advising that most received their health care directly through the Veterans' Hospital in Albany, NY. Mr. Strainer then asked how often Veterans' transportation had been provided and Ms. DiResta advised transportation had been offered five days per week and they had assisted eight to twelve Veterans per day. Ms. DiResta said the van currently available for continued transportation services could seat ten people comfortably, but did not provide the same handicap accessibility features that the bus had.

In response to an inquiry as to the means by which Saratoga and Washington Counties provided Veterans' transportation, Ms. DiResta explained that Saratoga County offered transportation five days per week, while Washington County used a rotating schedule that provided transportation two days one week and three days the next. She said she regularly received calls from Washington County residents seeking transportation on days when it was not provided by their County, which she had gladly allowed if the room was available.

Mr. Girard asked if they could contract with Washington County to provide transportation outside of their normal schedule, by providing transportation five days per week, with Warren County assuming half of the costs. Ms. DiResta replied that she was unsure how the logistics of an arrangement such as this would work with Washington County's pick-up schedule, as they provided pick-up and drop-off services at each Veterans' home. Mr. Strainer noted that if necessary, they could use the Municipal Center parking lot as the central pick-up site for all Warren County Veterans' to make the arrangement work. In the meantime, Mr. Strainer said he was very wary of using the current Veterans' Services van for transportation in light of Ms. DiResta's statements that it was in need of constant repair; additionally, he noted Mr. Dusek's prior comments with respect to the age and mileage of the Medicaid bus, and said he was also concerned the prospective purchase would lead to considerable maintenance costs. Ms. DiResta noted that she had recently funded approximately \$2,000 in repairs to the Medicaid bus and she questioned whether the amount could be reimbursed to her Department since use of the vehicle was no longer available.

Bill McGarr, former Director of Veterans' Services, apprised that the Medicaid bus had been purchased solely using Medicaid grant funds with no expense to the County. At the time the purchase was made, he said, an agreement between Veterans' Services and the DSS had been established to note that maintenance and repair costs would be assumed by Veterans' Services, while the Van Driver salaries and gas costs would be funded by the DSS. As per this agreement, Mr. McGarr stated that reimbursement could not be sought for the \$2,000 in repair expenses cited by Ms. DiResta. If transportation was not provided, Mr. McGarr cautioned, there might be some Veterans' that would be forced to apply for Medicaid benefits to receive medical care based on their inability to reach appointments at the Veterans' Hospital, thereby increasing costs to the State and County.

Mr. Strainer questioned the amount of money necessary to fund the Van Drivers' salaries and gas costs from August

1, 2011 through the end of the year and Ms. DiResta estimated the figure to be approximately \$10,000. *Please note: Subsequent to the meeting Ms. DiResta advised this total would be closer to \$16,000.*

Following further discussion on the matter, it was the consensus of the Committee to maintain Veterans' transportation services using the current Departmental van pending a response from the State as to whether the Medicaid bus could be acquired.

Motion was made by Mr. Bentley, seconded by Mr. Sokol and carried unanimously to approve Ms. DiResta's request and refer the issue to the Finance Committee to determine a source of funding for salary and gas costs associated with Veterans' transportation retroactive to August 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011. *A copy of the request is on file with the minutes.*

In the interim, Mr. Strainer asked Ms. DiResta to contact representatives from both Saratoga and Washington Counties to determine whether an agreement could be reached relative to transportation services while awaiting a response from the State.

Ms. DiResta said she had received an inquiry from Julie Montero, Fiscal Manager for the DSS, as to whether the Van Drivers' salaries and gas expenses could be immediately transferred to the Veterans' Services Budget and Mr. Dusek replied that they could not until after approvals were received from both the Finance Committee and the full Board of Supervisors; however, he added, once those approvals were received, the transfers could be made retroactively.

Concluding the agenda review, Ms. DiResta apprised that on Thursday, October 6th, Carl R's Café Restaurant & Bar and the Masonic Temple were joining forces to hold a benefit event for the Adirondack Vets House, Inc. located on Pine Street in Glens Falls, NY. She said a \$20 admission fee would be charged for a full Mexican buffet and live music by Kings English, with all proceeds going to support the operation of the Vets House.

Mr. Strainer commended Ms. DiResta on the Ceremony to Honor a Deceased Veteran held earlier that morning, which had been very nice. Ms. DiResta thanked him for the compliment and advised that if any of the Committee members knew of a deceased Veteran to be honored they should forward the information to her so that she could begin the necessary research.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, on motion made by Mr. Bentley and seconded by Mr. Girard, Mr. Strainer adjourned the meeting at 10:01 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Amanda Allen, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist